## **Comment & Letters**

### THE IRISH TIMES

24-28 TARA STREET, DUBLIN 2 SATURDAY, MAY 14TH, 2011 irishtimes.com

## Wellbeing of the over-50s

THE PUBLICATION this week of an initial report into the health and social status of the over-50s represents the first feedback from the most comprehensive study of its kind ever undertaken in the State. The Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing is a 10-year prospective study of the health, social and economic circumstances of a representative sample of 8,000 people aged 50 years and older. It is due to be completed in 2018. Led by Prof Rose Anne Kenny of Trinity College Dublin, the €12 million research project will provide policymakers and service providers with in-depth and reliable information needed to plan for the future needs of older people.

While the initial results show the majority of older people consider themselves healthy and are enjoying life, objective measurements of health parameters by researchers show how health declines with age. The prevalence of blood pressure problems, for example, increases from 30 per cent in those aged 50-64 years to 54 per cent in the over 75s. Some three-quarters of those surveyed are either overweight or obese.

Perhaps the most significant finding to date is the level of undiagnosed illness revealed by the screening process. Almost six in ten cases of hypertension in men and 50 per cent of cases in women had not been identified previously. The results also highlight the existence of a "sandwich" population of older people who use health services to a lesser degree. Among those identified as being in poor health, attendance at either GP clinics or emergency departments is lower among those not poor enough to qualify for a medical card but who are unable to afford private health insurance. This suggests the existence of a vulnerable group of over-50s who are most likely to experience unidentified and untreated illness.

Of those screened and found to have objective evidence of depression, 78 per cent did not report a doctor's diagnosis of depression. Levels of anxiety were also under-diagnosed. This diagnostic deficit is disturbing and warrants immediate action by health professionals working at the frontline as well as by those charged with planning primary healthcare for older people. A consistent finding is that people with higher levels of education and wealth enjoy better health outcomes in later life. It is a reminder that inequalities in health arise from social parameters set early in life.

On a positive note, people aged over 50 are a huge source of support to their adult children, and more than a quarter of them undertake voluntary work at least once or twice a month. Among those with surviving parents, some 25 per cent provide an average of 18 hours personal care each week for their parents. These findings underline the valuable societal role played by older people among their extended families as well as in the wider community.

This study is a valuable and strategic investment for the nation. The Minister for Health must ensure that its first report does not gather dust and that these early findings are acted upon by policymakers.

### Illegals in the US

OVE YE therefore the stranger: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt." President Obama was quoting from Deuteronomy at a Hispanic prayer breakfast this week. It reminds us, he said, "to look at that migrant farmer and see our own grandfather disembarking at Ellis Island, or Angel Island in San Francisco Bay; and to look at that young mother, newly arrived in this country, and see our own grandmothers leaving Italy or Ireland or Eastern Europe in search of something better."

On Tuesday in El Paso in a major speech he also insisted that "the overwhelming majority of these folks are just trying to earn a living and provide for their families" and contribute positively to the US economy. It is a sympathetic although controversial line, one that will, however, certainly endear him to a large Hispanic voting bloc which was critical to his election in 2008 and will be again in 2012. And, no doubt, to the young Irish campaigning for reform.

But in relaunching at six events over two weeks his welcome campaign for immigration reform - a "moral imperative" - a bid to regularise the position of 11 million undocumented without legal status Obama has returned to a cause that has frustrated him repeatedly since his election. And prospects for rekindling it are no better now that the House has come under control of the Republicans, implacably opposed as they are to any measure that might lead to eventual citizenship -"reward for illegality" - for illegal immigrants.

The speeches also come against a background of increasingly determined anti-immigrant action by up to a dozen states debating measures to tighten their own laws. Obama has been forced to match his calls for a path to citizenship with a simultaneous insistence he is as tough as anyone on enforcement of border controls. Nearly 400,000 immigrants were deported last year. there is tighter security along the Mexican border, and workplace inspections for illegal employees are up.

Democrats have pushed modest changes such as the DREAM Act, supported by Obama, which would allow people who immigrated illegally as children or teenagers to achieve permanent-resident status if they complete post-secondary education or military service. The Bill, a new version of which was introduced on Wednesday, is unlikely to succeed and Obama, unwilling to be seen bypassing Congress, has refused to use discretionary powers to overrule such deportations.

In truth, the undocumented will be waiting until 2012.

## Letters to the Editor

Email: lettersed@irishtimes.com (no attachments) Post: Letters to the Editor, 24-28 Tara St, Dublin 2 Fax: 01-6758035. Note: please provide name, postal address (at end of the letter) and telephone numbers. Letters may be edited or cut.

### Queen Elizabeth's visit

Madam, – I am looking forward with a degree of trepidation to the Oneen's visit to our shores. Let me hasten to add that my fears are not concerned with the rightness or otherwise of the visit's timing. I am worried that our Defence Forces' performance of the military ceremonial involved may not be up to the routine standard of excellence delivered by her own services.

As a former member of the reserve of our Army, I have to say that our performances over the years have been patchy, ranging from the sublime to the downright embarrassing. During the coming visit, the eyes of the world, not just those of the UK, will be on our military. Only a top-drawer performance will be acceptable. The Army top brass have had plenty of time to prepare for this, so there will be no excuses. Let the world see that whatever about being able to manage our economy, at least we can turn out a decent guard of honour. - Yours, etc

ANDY JONES, Mullagh. Co Cavan.

to pay a formal visit.

Madam, - The forthcoming visit of the Queen is welcome to most Irish people. I am sure the Queen is looking forward to it and it is about time that the head of state of a country with which we have full

diplomatic relations is at last able

any country with which we have close ties. - Yours, etc. JOHN GORMAN, Tallaght, Dublin 24

United States.

Apart from the historical

However, there is one thing that

aspect, it will also be a great boost

worries me as regards protocol. I

hope that no Irish person embar-

rasses us by bowing or curtsying to

the Queen or the Duke. No citizen

of a Republic should bow or curtsy

to royalty of any country.

Remember, we are citizens; the

British are subjects. The Queen

herself, some 12 or 15 years ago,

said publicly in Britain that it was

not necessary for anybody to bow

or bend the knee to her. The

Queen should be greeted in the

same way as the President of the

I have seen some footage

recently on television of both Mary

Robinson and Mary McAleese as

Presidents of Ireland meeting the

Oueen in Buckingham Palace and

Northern Ireland and both showed

no deference to Her Majesty,

other than as the head of state of

to tourism for years to come.

Madam, - All this talk of road closures, traffic restrictions, and so on brings a chilling reminder of the effect of last December's snow. However, remember the words

of the poet: If Windsor comes, can spring be far behind? - Yours, etc. ROBIN MILLER.

### **Ouestion of** debt forgiveness

Madam, - Master of the High Court Edmund Honohan (Home News, May 12th) clearly wants current legislation updated to meet contemporary social and economic conditions in our country, specifically in relation to

"debt forgiveness" Mr Honohan appears to have a humane disposition towards the plight of so many people who are unable to meet their financial commitments. His comments are

However, what is really disturbing, apart from the financial and social misery of so many people, is the fact that various pieces of legislation remain on the statute books of the State, such as the 1840 Judgment Mortgage Act and the 1850 Debtors (Ireland)

The Law Reform Commission report published in 2004 provided recommendations for many of our current legal problems, and yet seven years later, these recommendations have not been implemented

Can we really call ourselves a progressive society if some of our laws are, to say the least, inappropriate and anachronistic? -

JOE McBRIDE, Stradbrook Grove. Blackrock. Co Dublin

### Clarity on pension funds

Madam, - You will remember in the UK with disastrous results. that some years ago when Charlie McCreevy reduced the VAT rate, retailers did not reduce prices but just pocketed the difference.

The same will happen again. It is galling to see my pension fund being pilfered to enrich fast food outlets, cinema owners and hairdressers. – Yours, etc, JOHN DORIS,

Cabinteely Green,

Madam, - If someone I knew came to me and asked me if they could take a percentage of my hard-earned savings, I would have to satisfy myself that they are worthy of it and, most importantly, good for it. In the case of the pension levy, I would have to say no because, with respect, the Irish government is certainly not good or it. - Yours, etc. **UNA BLAKE** 

Lower Mayor Street,

Madam, - The political expe-

prised to note that Morgan Kelly's

prescription for the Irish economy

was received favourably by most of

the 12 economists quoted (Busi-

ness This Week, May 13th). By my

reckoning, only three did not

agree with him: the others seemed

to be in what might be termed

John McHale - seemed to think he

was criticising Patrick Honohan

for the bank guarantee. In fact,

Morgan Kelly's criticism was that

because Prof Honohan told the

country that it needed billions of

euro for a bank bailout on that infa-

mous Morning Ireland radio pro-

gramme, he seriously weakened

what little negotiating leverage

Brian Lenihan had with the

EU-ECB. Granted, Mr Cowen and

Mr Lenihan were playing their

cards very poorly, especially

regarding informing the Irish

Still, it's a hopeful sign that

Two - Moore McDowell and

provisional agreement

Morgan Kelly and the bailout

Madam, - I was pleasantly sur- Now if we could only get the EU

Following the Labour Party victory in the 1997 election Gordon Brown, the then chancellor, removed the tax exemption on dividends received by pension funds from their shareholdings. In effect, this was a levy of around 0.6 per cent per annum. It raised a huge sum, ostensibly to pay for a temporary scheme to solve youth unemploy ment.

It received public applause, including an editorial in the *Finan*cial Times, accompanied by the usual political rants about taxing wealthy tax dodgers.

The result over time was the destruction of almost all privatesector final salary schemes. The compound interest effect of this tax increase was to render pension schemes unable to meet future obligations, with the inevitable result that employers had no option but to close them, initially to new employees and eventually to all employees.

By this single misguided dient of raising taxes on pension measure, the British government

politicians to draw up a bailout pro-

gramme that the markets would

accept as sensible, then the PIIGS

would be happy and the rest of the farm content. - Yours, etc,

Madam, - The Cambridge econ-

omist AC Pigou, writing in 1920, is

worth quoting in the context of

Morgan Kelly's doom-laden eco-

nomic prognosis and solutions.

"The error of optimism dies in the

crisis but in dying it gives birth to

an error of pessimism. This new

LIAM COOKE,

Coolock.

Dublin 17

LIZ GILL.

Merton Park,

Greencastle Avenue

final salary pension system that had ensured security in old age for the majority of the labour force, from factory labourers to company chairmen, usually from age

To add insult to injury, publicsector employees were unaffected and still retire to enjoy their goldplated, inflation-proofed final salary pensions from age 60.

A lasting effect - also visible here in Ireland – is a rising resentment against the privileged position of the public sector, whose comfortable retirement is being paid for by a private sector destined to retire into comparative

The ultimate injustice of it all is this: without the levy, pensions would be higher, and the increased spending of the pensioners would create more employment – without, of course, needing an army of overpaid civil servants to administer job schemes. – Yours, etc,

BILL BAILEY. Kilcacan.

## **Dandelions**

Madam, Regarding the question in the verse quoted by Sheila Griffin (May 10th) "Dandelion, yellow as gold, What do you do all day?", the answer is,

apt "Dandelions growing on headlands, showing/Their unloved hearts to everyone" comes to mind. - Yours, etc

VERA HUGHES, Cartonkeel House Moate.

## Nama's art

Madam, – Perhaps Nama, after its donation of art to the National Gallery of Ireland (Home News, May 13th), should adopt for its logo the portrait of Lady Lavery as the idealised image of Ireland. Tarted up a little, but wearing a ragged shawl, of course.

 Yours, etc. NIALL McARDLE, Ontario.

#### was there that we learned that we had to let Him go in order that He might live and opened our hearts and minds to receiving the Holy

We return to the next uphill things lacking in our society generally and in our churches

particularly It calls us back to the commands of love, to the challenge of praying for our enemies and those who hate us. That commandment received little sympathy when somebody suggested praying for bin Laden

even the good and holy scurried

away from Jesus's snub to human

popular with the mob. But even the mob must learn that openness to the future is made impossible by clinging to

the past. Sometimes we have to let things ascend and go unjudged beyond us if we wish to make progress as people. This includes those who have cheated and hurt.

## An Irishman's Diary

#### Frank McNally

TOW THAT the countdown to the centenary has ▲ **1** begun, maybe it's time for another attempt to clear up one of the last remaining mysteries of the *Titanic*, the true identity of the passenger known as "John Horgan", who for 99 years has been as silent as the depths into which the ship sunk.

It is of course a common Irish name. And that a person so christened held a passenger ticket (Third class, No. 370377) for the doomed vessel is beyond doubt. So is the fact that somebody used that ticket to embark from Queenstown on the fateful day

But the problem is that John Horgan's apparent demise in the North Atlantic did not merit a single newspaper reference, other than his inclusion in the supposed passenger lists. Nor was he the subject of a compensation claim against the ship's owners.

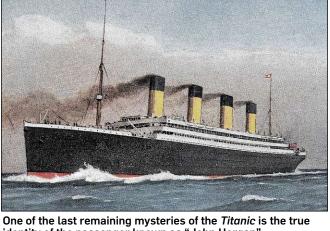
Nor was any charitable disbursement made in his name from the relief funds set up in the tragedy's wake.

There was no death notice anywhere either. And if the late John Horgan had an estate to administer, there is no trace of related legal action. So it seems fair to assume that, whoever he was. John Horgan was safe on dry land somewhere when the *Titanic* went down.

An obstacle to identifying ships' passengers at the time, after all, is that this was the era before passports became an indispensable part of international travel. Thus passenger tickets could be, and were, freely transferred.

Anyone who saw the 1997 cinema blockbuster will recall that Jack Dawson (Leo DiCaprio) wins his Titanic ticket in a dockside card game. And although this was not based on the story of any real-life passenger, it's hardly the least credible part of the story of his love affair with Kate Winslet.

Journalist and *Titanic* expert Senan Molony, author of several books on the subject, says that in common with 20 other passengers on the ship, Horgan had originally been listed to sail on a different vessel, the *Cymric* This was scheduled to leave **Oueenstown on Easter Sunday** April 7th - 1912. When it couldn't sail, ticket holders were instead booked onto the *Titanic* four days later.



identity of the passenger known as "John Horgan"

Somebody using Horgan's ticket did travel on that day, and - suggests Molony – may have done so in the company of one Patrick Dooley. At any rate, they had sequential tickets among those allocated to the rescheduled passengers. On the other hand, Dooley's family had no knowledge of his friendship with any Horgan. So their proximity may have been mere coincidence

Dooley, who had been home from Chicago to see his elderly father, was from Patrickswell, Co Limerick. And when listing presumed victims, New York's *Irish World* newspaper would later credit Horgan as being from Limerick too. Limerick is where the ticket was bought and the person holding it was, along with six other passengers from that county, among the last to board at Oueenstown (it's known that the connecting train from Cork was late arriving on the

**ASSUMING THE** real John Horgan had sold his ticket after failing to sail the previous Sunday would certainly explain the lack of newspaper references to anyone mourning his death. It later emerged, for example, that a Cork publican, William O'Doherty, had bought the ticket assigned to one James Moran, and so died in the latter's name

O'Doherty may in fact be a key to the mystery. He was said to have been friendly with another tavern worker. 19-year-old Timothy O'Brien, whom the Cork newspapers also insisted had gone down with the ship. The two were inextricably linked in newspaper reports. The Cork Examiner of April

17th, 1912, in an item headed "Believed Passengers", referred to "William Doherty [sic], 12 Old Market Place, employed by

Messrs W.F. O'Callaghan Daunt's Square, and Timothy O'Brien, billiard marker at the Oyster Tavern." The rival Cork Constitution newspaper made the same connection. But Timothy O'Brien does not appear on the list of passengers. It could be, therefore, that he had followed O'Doherty's example and bought his ticket from someone else, perhaps from John Horgan.

The censuses of 1901 and 1911 provide clues about the identity of passengers, although they may also add to the confusion. The 1901 version shows a Timothy O'Brien, aged 8 and one of six children living at 196 Blarney Street, northwest Cork city, with their parents Denis and Margaret. This would have made him 19

in 1912. He doesn't appear in the 1911 census in Cork, however. Instead there is a Timothy O'Brien of the same age working as a servant in a big house at Rockwell, Co Tipperary, where, incidentally, there is another young employee by the name James Landers, age 18. And while, as noted earlier, the Mansion House relief fund does not feature John Horgan among its Irish cases in a March 1913 report, it does list a mother with the surname Landers

The aforementioned James Landers appears to come from Tullamain, Limerick, his mother being a widow in the 1911 census Molony speculates that perhaps Horgan sold his ticket to O'Brien, who in turn sold it on to Landers, who was the unfortunate man to sail. But if anyone has new information on the case, he's waiting to hear from you now at the *Titanic* incident room: e-mail sennbrig@indigo.ie

• fmcnally@irishtimes.com

## and poetry

undoubtedly, propagate!

Seeing this year's bumper crop of the weed, Patrick Kavanagh's

Co Westmeath.

## collection

Wellington Street, Canada.

### have no atheistic Eurovision fans. experiment to test just how diffi-

Yours, etc.

Fairbrook Lawn, Rathfarnham, Dublin 14.

MICHELE SAVAGE. Glendale Park, Dublin 12,

on the current wave of popularity all the way to success tonight, and shoulder us with a bill for next year's Eurovision, I have a suggestion. Surely we could do worse than to blow the rest of the EU-IMF bailout money on the best show ever staged in the competition's history? Solid-gold seats for the audience would be one way to spend the cash. We could award the victors with their own weight

cult it is to burn through the kind of money our bankers and devel opers managed in just a few years. Angela Merkel and Nicholas

Sarkozy should have front-row seats to fully appreciate Ireland's entry – AJ and the Troikas – as they toss money from buckets into the crowd and offer any bondholders present a free haircut.

All contestants should be required to theme their songs around the subject of why Ireland should be allowed to keep its corporate tax rate. This may not be the best way to improve Ireland's image among its more soberminded trading partners, but compared with what we've been doing up to now, it would be money well spent. – Yours, etc. CHARLIE PIKE,

Leamore Lane. Newcastle, Co Wicklow.

### Social & Personal

DEIRDRE MULLALLY — ADRIAN HILL

Brendan and Patricia Mullally, Deansgrange, Co. Dublin are delighted to announce the engagement of their daughter Deirdre to Adrian, son of Robert and Mary Hill (née Geaney), Plymouth, Devon.

ESMOND GREENE — ÓRLA O'DONNELL Michael and Valerie O'Donnell of Rathfarnham, Dublin 14 are delighted to announce engagement of their daughter Orla to Esmond, son of Michael and Mairéad Greene of Shankill, Co.

GEORGE P. O'MALLEY — HAYLEY P. CAPPER The engagement is announced between George, son of George and Laura O'Malley, Mountain View, Castlebar and Hayley, daughter of Stephen and Patricia Capper, Elm Park, Hornchurch. Essex, England.

MISS SONIA CHAMP — DR. NEIL BARRETT and Audrey Champ, Rathfarnham, Dublin are delighted to announce the engagement of their daughter Sonia to Neil, son of Jerry and Fidelma Barrett, Middleton, Co. Cork

ROBIN GAHAN — CLARE MURPHY Robin and Clare, together with their parents, are delighted to announce their engagement.

GARETH CRAIG — MOIRA WYNNE Gareth, son of Brian and Anne Craig of Killiney, and Moira, daughter of Henry Wynne of Kilbarrick, are delighted to announce their recent engagement.

ANDREW KING Nadine Wai O'Flynn, daughter of Michael and Choi Lin O'Flynn of Rathmichael, Co. Dublin and Andrew King, son of James and Maeve King of Ballsbridge, Dublin are delighted to announce

NADINE WAI O'FLYNN —

their recent engagement. FIONA MILLS -ANNESLEY BARKER John Anne and Castleknock, Dublin have great pleasure in announcing engagement of their daughter Fiona to Annesley, son of Annesley and Marian Barker, Stillorgan, Dublin.

TANKARDSTOWN HOUSE, Slane, Co Meath 'Special Country House for your Special Day www.tankardstown.ie

Barry Moore at PHOTOGENIC

for beautiful photography of your wedding day. PHOTOGENIC.EU Tel: 284 5544 Frank Lyman's new Summer

occasion wear collection has

arrived at Nestors, Galway. WEDDING Dresses from €299 at Marian Gale D.4

# Good times and bad

some notable Irish economists are thinking along the same lines. giant." Our leading economists

### Thinking Anew

THE COMPARISON tale of Joseph being sold into slavery returns at Easter. The sale of a man by his brothers is echoed in the tale of the denial betrayal and eventual execution of Christ. These were not the only times in history when a story of betrayal broke our hearts. Our histories and biographies are full of tales of disloyalty and cowardice.

These tales are found in families, workplaces, clubs. churches and wherever else humans tend to gather together.

There is another similarity between these two stories that is equally replicated in human life. This too is to be found in families, workplaces, clubs and churches but is far more uplifting.

In both stories the man who was to be the victim would triumph over the wrongdoings of others. Joseph's salvation was

economic but Christ's was spiritual; the one had the foresight to plan for a recession. the other the hindsight to defeat despair.

Recession and desnair come hand in hand. They always have done and they always will do. We also know that life, both for individuals and society, has its ups and downs, good times and bad profits and losses. With all the hand-wringing

about who foresaw our recent downturn, you could easily get the idea that Ireland had forgotten its songs, its history and its prayers. The canon of Scripture may have been set but the story of God and his people is ongoing. Every grandmother lighting candles that I ever met knew that the bad times were near.

Anybody tuned to the experience and rhythm of life foresaw the downturn. Those who appear to be afflicted with giant doses of this condition. - Yours, JOHN O'BYRNE Mount Argus Court, Harold's Cross, Dublin 6W.

Madam, - Is it not interesting that neither Prof Honohan nor his many supporters have, to date, Madam, - You chose 12 refuted one of Prof Kelly's key economists to comment on points: that Ireland's unseemly rush to the IMF-EU bailout facility Morgan Kelly's article and you last November was forced upon couldn't find one woman? - Yours, the government by forces high up within the EU with the primary purpose of sending a warning shot across Spain's bow? Spain's

economy is just too critical to be allowed to fall The many opinion pieces and disagreements by professional economists to date vividly demonstrate that the so-called science of economics is undeserving of the

title. – Yours, etc. DERMOT GOWAN. Sancerre Park, Wexford

thought those days would last

forever were simply deluded.

One of the great fruits of faith

is the challenge it makes to delusion. The believer, from the very beginning, acknowledges that there are things far greater than he or she can understand. We know that human greed and the lust for power and influence have always brought suffering and we strive to conquer them. We have seen how they have destroyed so much in the past. We see its legacy in every place and in every time. The families burdened with negative equity today echo back to the rural depopulation of the 1930s, to the evictees of the

A few years go by and the incredible suffering is consigned to a sympathetic page in a history book. Then we forget all about it and let it happen to another generation again. Against this we stand in that

1840s and the dispossessed of the

strange season between Easter and Ascension. We remember that surely confused time in the early church

when all certainty was removed

and a bleak future lay ahead. It

Spirit. It was through this that we learned how to hope again. struggle for faith and dignity, two

vengefulness. Peter did as such! A lot of what Christ said isn't

right through to those who kill recklessly. - F Mac E

### Cheering on Jedward Madam, - OMG! Thank God we in diamonds. Think of it as an

TONY CORCORAN,

Madam, - Is this year's Eurovision about songs, or out-Jedwarding Jedward? - Yours, etc,

Madam, - Should Jedward ride